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## If You're Hot You're Hot

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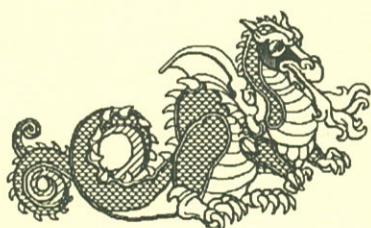
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# If You're Hot You're Hot

**Softstrip: A library-friendly tool, or just another piece of software?**

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**S**oftstrip may not be a term that you have ever heard of to date. Or, if you have heard of it, perhaps not within the circles of library automation. As Softstrip was not specifically designed with the librarian in mind, this would not be at all surprising.

**What is Softstrip, and why could it be of any interest to a librarian?**

Softstrip is a slick and inexpensive little piece of software which was designed to allow its users to convert software, data, graphics, or sound into computer-readable printed strips. In appearance and functionality, the strip much resembles the bar code: it uses black and white patterns to transfer (electronic) information. Like the bar code, once the conversion to the patterns has taken place, the strips can be printed onto virtually any surface using a wide variety of printers. Later, the user can "read" the information back into his or her computer by means of a "Stripreader." No re-keying of information need take place.

To date, one of the most popular uses of the Strip has been made by the PC magazines. In these magazines, the strips are used to distribute programmes. They are printed alongside the hard-copy programmes which the magazine's readers are offered. Hereby, rather than having to re-type the published

programme, the user can simply "read" it into his computer using his own Stripreader. Errors are avoided and much time won. A second application was announced by the American Veterinary Medical Association in their journal in August 1989. The AVMA stated that they would use the strips to enable their readers to "read" bibliographic data into their computers for incorporation into personal literature databases.

One of the attractions of both the hard- and software connected with Softstrip is that they are simple to use and inexpensive. The programme, Stripmaker, which is used for generating the Strip, costs between \$324 - \$432 depending upon the printing device to be used to print the strip (in this case, the prices cited are for a laserprinter and a Linotronic typesetter respectively). The present Stripreader costs \$489.60. It will read one strip in 20-30 seconds. The developers of the Strip hard- and software are presently working on a Stripreader which will be smaller - the size of an electric razor - than the present one, which is 16 inches long, and will be able to read a strip in 1-2 seconds per strip. The new reader, which will be available next Spring, will also be capable of reading standard bar codes.

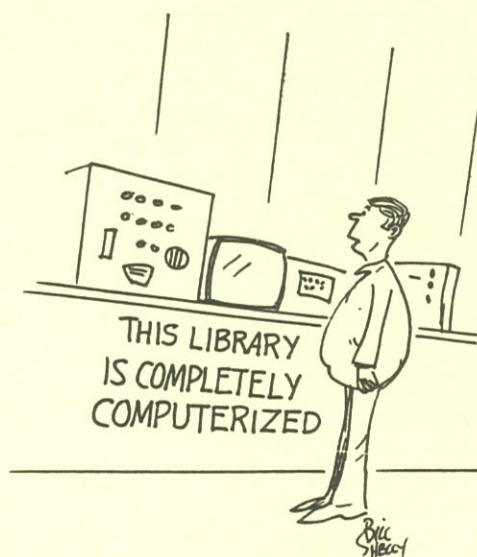
**So, in what way(s) could this be of interest to a librarian?**

This is a question in which I - as representative of Wolters Kluwer Academic Publishers am very interested - would love to be able to give you the answer to. It is, in fact, the crux and reason for this article. However, to be able to adequately answer the above question, I need your input. Wolters Kluwer Academic Publishers is a company greatly in favour of the use of standards. Consequently, it was a front-runner in adopting the bar-code (SISAC symbol) for the covers of scientific journal issues; it is experimenting with SGML and EDI. And, at present, it is also actively in the business of researching those standards, products and ideas which could be of help in enhancing the usability and usefulness of its own products. Needless to say, however, the number and potential of the available ideas is phenomenal. As a result, finding out which of these would be of the most use and have the greatest appeal on its markets is no mean task. However, they are solutions we, as publishers, should seek and which we feel the librarian can help us find.

The initial reason for my research into "Softstrip," then, was the thought that a useful library application might actually lie there. And, if it could be distributed widely enough, it might actually prove to be of great use not only to us, but also to our colleagues and

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*What's in charge here?*

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others. My "discovery" of Softstrip was purely accidental. However, Softstrip's potential for general applicability, its ease of use and its low price seemed reason enough for me to examine it further. That it might be used broadly by the library community appealed to me a great deal more than did its present application. I hoped to find that, combined with some form of standardized input and procedure, it would, for example, be possible to use the Strip to:

1. help libraries to incorporate information which was not readily available to them into their already existing (online or CD) databases, or
2. help them to build their own databases of specific kinds of information, or
3. provide the library with bibliographic information which enhanced or supplemented what they already had (for instance,

tables of contents, index or abstract information).

My primary problem consisted of my own lack of knowledge about how to structure the information in such a way as to be compatible to in-house systems.

These are questions with which I am still confronted.

Wolters Kluwer Academic Publishers is - and I, in particular, am - keen to know what your ideas on this product are. Perhaps you know of ways in which you would apply it, and under what conditions it would be of use to you in your own working situation. Or, if you do not see an application of any use to you, perhaps you are interested in telling me what it is you do seek as enhancements to the usability of our information. I would be particularly pleased to hear your views. Quite recently, I became a member of STM's Innovations Committee (If you are

unacquainted with STM, it is the Foundation of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers. STM represents these publishers internationally and in a variety of areas which might be of importance to them, including innovation, acquisition, library relations, and marketing. It regularly informs them of developments in these areas which are applicable to them.) As an active member of that group, I am greatly interested in approaching librarians to this end. The STM Innovations Committee organizes at least one seminar each year for its members. Next year, it would be possible to use the seminar/conference as a platform for a discussion on the use of new media in the library.

We are looking to find out just what it is you, as a librarian, would like to see developed in this area, what products-enhancements you are looking for, and in what form. I am presently in search of a forum of librarians who would be interested in taking part in such a discussion, whether this be before, after or during the Charleston Conference. Wolters Kluwer Publishers is a world-wide publisher, and the United States represents one of its major markets. As a result, American publishers have an important say in what we do to improve the handling of our product in American libraries. If you feel you would have something to contribute - be this about the product, Softstrip, discussed above - or about any other ideas you may have about products or means of electronic exchange between libraries and publishers, I would greatly appreciate hearing from you. ☛